DELIBES
Lakmé

Mado Robin • Libero De Luca
Agnès Disney • Jean Borthayre
Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra-Comique, Paris
Georges Sébastian

NAXOS

Leo

DELIBES

(1836-1891)

Lakme

Opera in 3 acts

Libretto by Edmond Gondinet and Philippe Gille,
after Pierre Loti

Lakme	Mado Robin (soprano)
Mallika	Agnès Disney (mezzo-soprano)
Ellen	Claudine Collart (soprano)
Rose	Simone LeMaître (soprano)
Gerald	Libero De Luca (tenor)
Nilakantha	Jean Borthayre (bass)
Frederic	Jacques Jansen (baritone)
Hadji	Pierre Germain (tenor)
Mistress Bentson	Jane Perriat (mezzo-soprano)
Fortune Teller	Edmond Chastenet (tenor)
Chinese Merchant	Camille Rouquetty (tenor)

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opera-Comique, Paris
Georges Sebastian

Recorded July 1952 in the Maison de la Mutualite, Paris
First issued on Decca LXT 2738-40

Reissue Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston

CD 1 **70:33**

1 *Prélude* 3:06
(Orchestra)

Act I **47:02**

2 *À l'heure accoutumée* 3:36
(Hadji, Mallika, Chorus, Nilakantha)

3 *Blanche Dourga, pâle Silva!* 3:42
(Lakme, Chorus, Nilakantha)

4 *Lakmé, c'est toi qui nous protèges!* 2:54
(Nilakantha, Lakme, Hadji, Mallika)

5 *Viens, Mallika...Dôme épais le jasmin* 4:40
(Lakme, Mallika)

6 *Miss Rose, Miss Ellen, respectez les clôtures!* 2:18
(Mistress Bentson, Ellen, Rose, Gerald, Frederic)

7 *Quand une femme est si jolie* 1:17
(Ellen, Frederic, Gerald, Rose, Mistress Bentson)

8 *Leur vertu bizarre manque d'apparat* 4:36
(Frederic, Ellen, Rose, Mistress Bentson, Gerald)

9 *Prendre le dessin d'un bijou...*
Fantaisie aux divins mensonges 6:04
(Gerald)

10 *C'est elle...c'est Lakmé* 3:00
(Gerald, Lakme, Mallika)

11 *Les fleurs me paraissent plus belles...*
Pourquoi dans les grands bois 4:43
(Lakme)

12 *D'où viens-tu? Que veux-tu?* 3:45
(Lakme, Gerald)

13 *C'est le dieu de la jeunesse* 4:58
(Gerald, Lakme, Hadji, Nilakantha, Chorus)

14 *Entr'acte* 1:28
(Orchestra)

Act II (Beginning) **20:24**

15 *Allons, avant que midi sonne* 4:53
(Chorus, Mistress Bentson, Frederic, Rose)

16 *Enfin!...Nous aurons du silence!* 1:01
(Rose, Mistress Bentson, Frederic)

17 *Danses: Terâna-Rektah-Persane-Coda-Sortie* 5:47
(Chorus)

18 *Voyez donc ce vieillard et cette jeune fille!* 5:15
(Rose, Mistress Bentson, Frederic, Nilakantha, Lakme)

19 *Lakmé, ton doux regard se voile* 3:28
(Nilakantha)

CD 2 **79:13**

Act II (Conclusion) **36:59**

1 *Ah, c'est de ta douleur* 3:44
(Lakme, Nilakantha, Chorus)

2 *Où va la jeune indoue* ("Bell Song") 5:25
(Lakme)

3 *La rage me dévore* 3:42
(Nilakantha, Lakme, Chorus)

4 *Au milieu des chants d'allégresse* 2:48
(Nilakantha, Chorus, Lakme)

5 *Le maître ne pense qu'à sa vengeance* 1:52
(Hadji)

6 *Lakmé! Lakmé! C'est toi!* 3:13
(Gerald, Lakme)

7 *Dans la forêt près de nous* 4:47
(Lakme)

8 *Ô Dourga, toi qui renais* 1:47
(Chorus, Ellen, Rose, Miss Bentson, Frederic, Gerald)

9 *Voyez, cette ville en fête* 6:04
(Ellen, Rose, Miss Bentson, Frederic, Gerald, Lakme)

10 *Entr'acte* 3:36
(Orchestra)

Act III **24:57**

11 *"Sous le ciel tout étoilé"* 2:00
(Lakme)

12 *Quel vague souvenir alourdit ma pensée?... Ah! viens, dans la forêt profonde* 4:09
(Gerald, Lakme)

13 *Là, je pourrai t'entendre* 4:13
(Lakme, Gerald, Chorus)

14 *Vivant!...Ah! Frédéric!* 3:24
(Frederic, Gerald)

15 *Ils allaient deux à deux* 4:34
(Lakme, Gerald, Chorus)

16 *Tu m'as donné le plus doux rêve* 3:36
(Lakme, Gerald)

17 *C'est lui! C'est lui!* 3:01
(Nilakantha, Lakme, Gerald)

APPENDIX
Lakmé: Three arias sung by French singers of the 1920s and 30s

18 *Prendre le dessin d'un bijou... Fantaisie aux divins mensonges* 5:35
Miguel Villabella
Orchestra • François Ruhlmann
Recorded 1931; matrices N 250.255 / N 250.256; cat. Pathe X. 90.050

19 *Lakmé, ton doux regard se voile* 4:20
Robert Couzinou
Orchestre de l'Association des Concerts Lamoureux
Albert Wolff
Recorded 1929; matrix 1727 BM; cat. Polydor 566022

20 *Où va la jeune indoue* ("Bell Song") 7:21
Leila Ben Sedira
Orchestra • Maurice Frigara
Recorded 1929; matrices 95555/56; cat. Parlophone 59513

Léo Delibes (1836-1891)
Lakmé

The French composer Leo Delibes was born in Saint-Germain du val, near Le Mans, in 1836, the grandson of an opera singer, and the son of a postman and his musical wife. Following the early death of his father, he was raised by his mother and uncle who introduced him to the piano and to composition. He entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1847 as a composition pupil of Adolphe Adam, the composer of the ballet *Giselle*. He served as accompanist and chorus-master at the Theâtre-Lyrique between 1853 and 1864, and was appointed second chorus-master at the Paris Opera in 1865. He was also a church organist between 1853 and 1871.

Delibes's first work for the theatre was the light opera *Deux sous de charbon*, which was staged at the Folies-Nouvelles in 1856. He continued to compose similar works for the next fifteen years, at the rate of about one a year. Following the success of his ceremonial cantata *Alger*, written for Napoleon III, he was invited to collaborate with another composer, Leon Minkus, on the creation of the ballet *La Source*, first performed in 1866. Delibes's contributions were considered most successful and he was asked to compose additional music for the revival of Adam's *Le Corsaire* in 1867. This was followed by the commission for his first full-length ballet score, *Coppélia*, which received is first performance in 1870 to great acclaim. Delibes was the first composer of ballet music to include within it expressive elements. His score for the ballet *Sylvia,* first seen in 1876, is considered to be the best ballet music before Tchaikovsky, who judged it to be finer even than his own *Swan Lake*.

Between *Coppélia* and *Sylvia* Delibes composed his first full-length opera, *Le Roi l'a dit*, which received its première at the Opera-Comique in 1873. This was followed by another opera, *Jean de Nivelle*, first seen in 1880. By now established as a leading member of the French musical establishment, Delibes was appointed professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire in 1881. The following year he composed incidental music for a production at the Comedie-Française of Victor Hugo's play *Le Roi s'amuse*. Thereafter he devoted himself to opera. His greatest operatic success, *Lakmé*, received its first performance in 1883 at the Opera-Comique: it propelled him to the front rank of French composers for the stage and soon rivalled Bizet's *Carmen* in popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. Delibes was made a member of the Institut de France in 1884. At his death in 1891 he left unfinished the opera *Kassya*, which was completed by Massenet.

The score of *Lakmé* is characteristically French in its rich orchestration and elegant melodies. The setting is India, the time the mid-nineteenth century. The first act takes place in the flowered grounds of a Hindu temple. The Brahmin priest Nilakantha nurses an intense hatred for those who prevent him from practising his own religion (*CD 1: tracks 1-2*). He departs to attend a meeting of the faithful, leaving his daughter Lakme and her attendant Mallika outside the temple (*tracks 3-4*). They sing together, before departing in a boat to collect flowers from the jungle to place on the temple altar (*track 5*). Two English men, Gerald and Frederic, accompanied by two young English girls, Ellen and Rose, and their governess Miss Bentson, appear. They break through the bamboo fence that surrounds the temple, and comment that many of the flowers in the area are poisonous (*track 6*). They notice some of Lakme's pieces of jewelry lying on a stone table, and Gerald agrees to stay behind to make the sketches of these (*tracks 7-9*). Lakme and Mallika return, and Gerald hides (*track 10*). Mallika departs, leaving Lakme alone: when she sees Gerald she cries out in alarm, but she sends away those who come to her aid (*track 11*). She tells Gerald that he must forget that he ever saw her, but he is fascinated by Lakme (*track 12*). Nilakantha returns, sees the violation of the temple grounds, and swears to kill those responsible (*track 13*).

The second act is set in the busy market-place of a nearby town, which Ellen, Miss Bentson and Frederic are visiting (*tracks 14-17*). In order to identify the

temple intruder, Nilakantha had disguised himself as a beggar and, despite commenting on her unhappy looks, forces Lakme to sing in order to attract the attention of the trespasser (*tracks 18-19*). She sings of the legend of the Pariah's daughter who saved the life of Vishnu, the son of Brahma, by ringing her bracelet bells to warn him of an imminent attack (*CD 2: tracks 1-2*). To Nilakantha's dismay, no one answers to her singing and he commands her to continue (*track 3*). Gerald now appears from the crowd, recognizing Lakme (*tracks 4-8*). As he approaches her, Nilakantha stabs him, but Gerald is only slightly injured. Hadji, Nilakantha's servant, helps Lakme to take Gerald to her secret hiding place in the forest (*track 9*).

The third and final act is set in Lakme's forest hut where she is tending Gerald (*tracks 10-12)*. The distant sound of singing can be heard. She tells him it is lovers who come to drink from the sacred spring, and whose waters confer the gift of eternal love. She urges him to drink the magical water that will ensure the couple everlasting love. Gerald hesitates, torn between his love for her and his duty to his regiment. Lakme leaves to fetch the sacred water (*track 13*). Frederic appears and urges Gerald to return to duty, which he agrees to do (*track 14*). When Lakme returns she notices a change in Gerald (*track 15*). Realising that she has lost him, she tears a leaf from a fatal tree and bites it. As she is dying, they drink together from the water of the sacred river (*track 16*). Nilakantha enters and Lakme tells him she and her lover have shared the sacred water: Gerald is therefore sacrosanct to the gods. If they demand a sacrifice she will give them what they ask. She dies in Gerald's arms (*track 17*).

Decca's 1952 recording of *Lakmé* featured a fine Francophone cast of the period. Leading the forces of the Paris Opera-Comique was the Hungarian-born conductor, **Georges Sébastian** (1903-1989). After studying at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, Sebastian worked in Munich with Bruno Walter, before a season as an assistant conductor with the Metropolitan Opera, New York. On returning to Europe he held conducting appointments at Hamburg and Leipzig, after which he rejoined Walter at the Berlin Städtische Opera. Between 1931 and 1937 he conducted the Moscow Radio Orchestra. He was active in North and South America during the Second World War, after which he settled in Paris. He became chief conductor at the Paris Opera, as well as appearing frequently at the Opera-Comique and with the Orchestre National, the principal broadcasting orchestra of France.

Mado Robin (1918-1960) was born in Yzeures-sur-Creuse in the Touraine. She won the Paris Concours des sopranos in 1937, but the outbreak of the Second Word War delayed the launch of her operatic career. She made her debut at the Paris Opera in 1945 as Gilda, and gave her first performance as Lakme, which was to become her most famous rôle, during the following year at the Opera-Comique. She enjoyed enormous popularity in France, where she was also a frequent broadcaster, her exceptional vocal range enabling her to sing a wide repertoire. In 1954 she appeared at San Francisco as Gilda and Lucia, and she toured the USSR in 1959. She died in Paris in 1960 from cancer, a few days before the 1,500th performance of *Lakmé* at the Opera-Comique, arranged for her birthday.

The Swiss tenor **Libero de Luca** (born 1913) studied in Stuttgart and Zurich. He was a prize-winner at competitions in Paris in 1937 and Geneva in 1941. He made his operatic debut at Soleure in 1942. After a season at Berne he was principal tenor at the Zurich Opera from 1943 to 1949. During the immediate post-war period he appeared with success in Buenos Aires, Naples, London, Brussels and Munich. He was appointed first lyric tenor at the Opera-Comique in 1949 and also sang regularly at the Paris Opera, specialsing in the French repertoire. He retired from the stage on 1961 to devote himself to teaching.

Jean Borthayre (1901-1984) was born near Mauleon and spent his youth as a shepherd in the Basque area. The Paris Conservatoire refused to accept him in 1926, but continued his vocal studies while working in a variety of different jobs, including that of taxi-driver. In 1934 he appeared at the Casino de Paris singing Basque songs, alongside Tino Rossi. The outbreak of war in 1939 prevented him fulfilling a contract with the Algiers Opera. He appeared in small

parts at Toulouse in 1941, and enjoyed his first significant success singing Verdi at Strasbourg in 1946. He first sang at the Opera-Comique in 1951, making his debut in Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*. A few years later he appeared at the Paris Opera as Valentin in Gounod's Faust, which he also recorded under Cluytens. He retired at the age of seventy to Montmorency where he died.

David Patmore

Ward Marston

In 1997 Ward Marston was nominated for the Best Historical Album Grammy Award for his production work on BMG's Fritz Kreisler collection. According to the Chicago Tribune, Marston's name is 'synonymous with tender loving care to collectors of historical CDs'. Opera News calls his work 'revelatory', and Fanfare deems him 'miraculous'. In 1996 Ward Marston received the Gramophone award for Historical Vocal Recording of the Year, honouring his production and engineering work on Romophone's complete recordings of Lucrezia Bori. He also served as re-recording engineer for the Franklin Mint's Arturo Toscanini issue and BMG's Sergey Rachmaninov recordings, both winners of the Best Historical Album Grammy.

Born blind in 1952, Ward Marston has amassed tens of thousands of opera classical records over the past four decades. Following a stint in radio while a student at Williams College, he became well-known as a reissue producer in 1979, when he restored the earliest known stereo recording made by the Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1932.

In the past, Ward Marston has produced records for a number of major and specialist record companies. Now he is bringing his distinctive sonic vision to bear on works released on the Naxos Historical label. Ultimately his goal is to make the music he remasters sound as natural as possible and true to life by 'lifting the voices' off his old 78 rpm recordings. His aim is to promote the importance of preserving old recordings and make available the works of great musicians who need to be heard.

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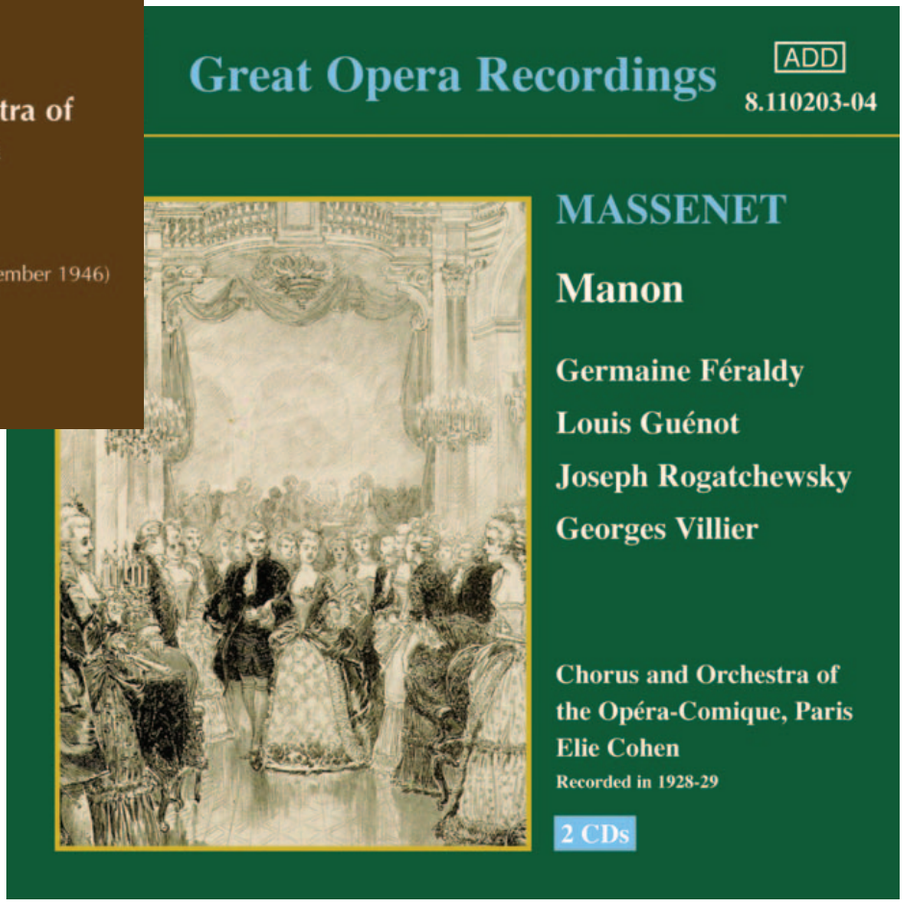

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Léo
DELIBES
(1836-1891)

Lakmé

Lakmé	Mado Robin
Gérald	Libero De Luca
Mallika	Agnès Disney
Nilakantha	Jean Borthayre
Ellen	Claudine Collart
Rose	Simone LeMaître

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra-Comique, Paris
Georges Sébastian
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ADD
Playing Time 2:29:16

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1-14	Prelude - Act I	50:08
15-19	Act II - Beginning	20:24

CD 2 — 79:13

1-10	Act II - Conclusion	36:59
11-17	Act III	24:57
18-20	Appendix	17:16
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Reissue Producer and Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston
Cover photo: Mado Robin (Private Collection)

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